

Core Concepts

Division of Juvenile Corrections

Moving Forward Together

Issue 3, May 2014

Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development, or PYD, is a comprehensive way of thinking about youth development that is based on a body of research suggesting that all adolescents—including those involved in the juvenile justice system—have strengths, and that exposure to positive influences can facilitate a youth's individual growth and development (Lerner, et. al., 2005; USDHHS, n.d.; Zarrett, 2008). Research in the fields of psychology and biology has documented the potential for systematic change, or plasticity, in the course of human development, indicating that undesirable behavior can be prevented or changed (Butts, et. al., 2005).

Positive Experiences + Positive Relationships + Positive Environments = Positive Youth Development

As juvenile justice practitioners, we have the opportunity to facilitate the development of youth strengths and assets through our programs and practices and by developing pro-social, caring relationships with the youth in our care. The National Research Council of the Institute of Medicine (2002) found that youth programs are more successful if they provide youth with:

- *Physical and psychological safety and security*
- *Clear expectations for behavior, as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions, to participate in governance and rule-making, and to take on leadership roles as one matures and gains more expertise*
- *Emotional and moral support*
- *Supportive adult relationships*
- *Opportunities to form close, durable human relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors*
- *A sense of belonging and personal value*
- *Opportunities to develop positive social values and norms*
- *Opportunities for skill building and mastery*
- *Opportunities to develop confidence in their abilities to master their environment*
- *Opportunities to make a contribution to their community and to develop a sense of mattering*
- *Strong links between families, schools, and broader community resources*

The Five Cs of Positive Youth Development

What are the characteristics of positive youth development?

Competence

Positive view of one's actions in specific areas, including social, academic, cognitive, health, and vocational

Confidence

An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy

Character

Respect for societal and cultural norms, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity

Connection

Positive bonds with people and institutions reflected in exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship

Caring

A sense of sympathy and empathy for others

Positive Youth Development in Juvenile Corrections

“How these youth are treated while incarcerated has a marked impact on the rest of their life, their communities, and on our society as a whole” (Newell, 2013).

Many of the youth we work with in DJC do not live in communities or did not grow up in families that provide the positive influences necessary to foster healthy youth development. However, other environments offer youth opportunities for the development of assets and strengths, and “most young people can develop and flourish if they are connected to the right mix of social resources” (Butts, et. al., 2005). Juvenile corrections staff can provide relationships and environments that support positive youth development, even in a secure residential setting, and DJC continues to make significant progress in this regard.

Instead of...	We can...
Taking a “guard-like” approach to supervising and interacting with youth	Demonstrate caring and foster safety and security for youth and staff by developing positive, pro-social connections and relationships with youth
Focusing on punishing anti-social behavior	Facilitate the development of youth competence and confidence by rewarding pro-social thoughts and behaviors as part of a comprehensive behavior management approach
Maintaining harsh institutional living quarters	Create physical and emotional spaces where youth feel safe to take healthy risks and make positive changes
Thinking that delinquent youth can’t change or that facilitating change is someone else’s job	Be models for youth of what it means to have strong character, follow positive social norms, develop healthy relationships, and have a sense of belonging and value
Operating in “silos” of narrowly-focused job duties	Collaborate across the unit/school/agency to provide a coordinated, integrated approach to supporting youth development

References and Resources

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For more information...

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